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ABSTRACT

After seven judges had ranked 30 families for observed parental consumer teaching orientations and family television viewing habits, one family was selected for each cell of a 3X3 factorial design for age of children (3 to 5, 6 to 8, 9 to 11) and family consumer teaching orientation (high, moderate, low). These nine family groups were observed over three months in family group viewing situations. The observational records supported the view that children, including preschoolers, are potentially sophisticated viewers, able to deal with television advertising and affected by the family group's particular consumer-related skills and knowledge. The findings challenged the view that a child's ability to understand television advertising is determined at age-graded stages of cognitive development. As skilled interactants at early ages, children identify and define the nature of television commercials in relation to consumer-related levels of interaction with parents, make demands and requests of parents and others in relation to the character of viewing situations, seek out information about commercial content and other social events, plan future social actions toward and through television commercials, and negotiate various joint acts with others while situated in front of the family television set. (RL)

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CHILDREN'S INTERACTIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH TELEVISION ADVERTISING AS AN INDEX OF VIEWING SOPHISTICATION: A SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST STUDY

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CHILDREN'S INTERACTIONAL EXPERIENCE WITH TELEVISION ADVERTISING AS AN INDEX OF VIEWING SOPHISTICATION: A SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST STUDY

Many studies of the child/television advertising relationship have used Piaget's theory of cognitive development as their theoretical perspective (Wackman and Wartella, 1977). This perspective assumes that the cognitive abilities of children develop according to age-graded stages, which call out fix responses to such objects as television commercials. Until age seven or eight it is held that social life does not exist among children. They are considered to be enclosed within their individual perspectives, seeing things only from within it. Their perceptions, evaluations, and understandings are assumed to be absolute or egocentric, as they are regarded as incapable of placing themselves in the perspectives of others. The general conclusion drawn from this body of research is that a child's understanding of television advertising becomes sophisticated only with increasing age.

The symbolic interactionist perspective suggests that such a theoretical view is at odds with the realities of the social world. As Denzin (1973) has demonstrated, any model of child development must be grounded in the ongoing experiences of the child's social world, not from sociopsychological traits or predetermined stages of cognitive development that the child brings into the world at birth. Age does not call out predetermined responses in children to television advertising. Rather it is the interactive experiences to which the child is exposed that shape and mold his abilities to perceive, evaluate, and understand

television advertising, especially early family group viewing experiences (1972). As Denzin has suggested, the child and his abilities are products of social interaction. The child, in fact, has been shown to possess the ability to take the standpoint of others and present social self as early as one year of age. Notes Denzin (1972: 309-310):

> Children then are complex social objects. They are skilled interactants far beyond what many theories give them credit. Their interactional skills, like those of adults, reflect the situations and objects that they must confront in daily life. Until this complexity is recognized and incorporated in empirical studies of the child, then images of socialization and society will remain incomplete. If, as I have suggested, children are skilled interactants at relatively early ages, then it is apparent that societies, as ongoing symbolic concerns, are produced and reproduced at quite early stages in the life cycle.

The above critique suggests a basic limitation which weakens cognitive developmental studies from the point of view of the sociological investigation of communications phenomena. This limination is grounded in the perspective's view that chronological age is the primary determinant of a child's level of viewing sophistication. The symbolic interactionist perspective, however, offers an alternative view that overcomes this sociological shortcoming. Rather than assuming a blanket similarity in a child's level of viewing sophistication across age-graded stages of cognitive development, the symbolic interactionist perspective suggests that viewing sophistication is the social product of the interactional experience that the child viewer carries to the viewing situation and the actions that he and others, particularly family group members, (Dreitzel, 1973; Elkin and Handel, 1972; Shibutani, 1961) take toward television commercials. Specifically, a child's previous interactional experience with television advertising is viewed as an important index to his level of sophistication in viewing behaviors and to the extent to which he has learned to understand and deal with television commercials.

This study, grounded in the perspective and method of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), seeks to uncover if a child's ability to handle television advertising is influenced by previous interactional experience with the medium and by family group interaction concerning consumer-related skills and knowledge. The investigation, rather than attempting to correlate survey data with predetermined age-graded stages of cognitive development, focuses on the influence of these factors from the point of view of the child as part of the family group viewing situation. The following section briefly overviews the methodological advantages of the symbolic interactionist perspective. Subsequent sections detail the precise method used in this investigation and present the collected observational data.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The term symbolic interactionism refers to a unique social/psychological perspective on human behavior. Use of the symbolic interactionist perspective as a theoretical basis for an examination of the child/television advertising relationship dictates a different conceptualization for study and necessitates a different methodological approach which allows for a better fit of research strategy to the empirical world. Specifically, Frazer (1976) has offered four reasons which make this line of inquiry a methodological approach well suited for studying particular aspects of child television viewing.

First of all, study takes place in the real world environment of television, thus grounding the research in the natural setting of the activity to be examined. The research is based on data collected by observation of children in their own homes viewing television. Instances of the child viewing by himself, with his parents and with his peers and siblings are observed and recorded.

Secondly, an effort is made by the researcher to understand the disposition on the part of the subjects toward the activity. Human action is interactive and complex and requires that study of it reflect its changing character. To do this

the researcher locates himself in the viewing environment, making himself a party to the activity under study, and talks with children about the commercials and programs that they watch.

Thirdly, the examination of television is made in relation to other influences. Complexity in human action is a partial result of the many influences which interact and continually redefine a social situation. Cognizance of this requires that the researcher attend not only to observed behavior under study, but to other influences operating within and outside the observed sphere of activity.

Fourth, an attempt is made to study the phenomenon in breadth. Rather than seizing upon one particular variable for exclusive examination, the researcher is open to all possibilities which persent themselves. To provide this perspective the researcher familiarizes himself with family's routines, the characteristics of each family organization and the activities of each family.

METHOD

Two methods were used to gather data: 1) personal interviews were conducted to determine a family group's consumer teaching orientation and viewing habits and patterns, and 2) participant observation was used to empirically study the formative aspects of children's interaction with the content of television commercials, while actually situated in the family group viewing situation.

Personal Interviews

To select nine children to be included in an observational scheme, thirty children and their families were personally interviewed. The interviews were conducted in the children's homes, with an many family members present as possible.

As a group, each family was asked to respond to questions concerning: 1) general demographic information; 2) television viewing habits and patterns; and 3) parental concern and involvement in consumer education. To avoid the

rigidity of the structured interview schedule, an unstructured schedule was used. Considering the exploratory nature of this study, the unstructured interview schedule provided respondents the opportunity to respond freely to open-ended questions and the interviewer the opportunity to probe such responses.

Method and Procedure for Determining Family Consumer Teaching Orientations

In the family group context, Ward, Wackman, and Wartella (1975) have shown that a child learns about being a consumer in three ways: 1) by observing his parent's behavior; 2) by interacting with his parents; and 3) by being allowed to act as a consumer himself under parental guidance. As such, a family's involvement in each of these three modes influences a child's consumer development. Here a family's level of involvement was defined as a family group's consumer teaching orientation. Specifically, family group consumer teaching orientation was defined as how, intentionally or unintentionally, a particular family teaches its children the knowledge, attitudes, and skills relevant to their functioning in the marketplace, especially those related to television advertising.

A review of all relevant literature revealed no useful operational measures for determining a family group's consumer teaching orientation. Two studies, however, reported evidence relevant to this social process (Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1975; Berey and Pollay, 1968). In view of this limitation, a method and procedure was developed for selecting family groups to be included in the observational design in terms of their consumer teaching orientations.

Categorizing Interview Data

Data gathered through personal interviews were systematically ordered into nine specific categories concerning consumer teaching orientations. Most of the categories, borrowed from previous research by Ward and Ward, Wackman, and Wartella, (1975) were ordered as follows:

Parental Consumer-Oriented Goals

1. Money Related Skills
2. Price/Bargain Skills and Knowledge
3. Quality/Product Skills and Knowledge
4. Information Source Use Skills and Knowledge

Parental Consumer Teaching Modes

1. Prohibiting Certain Consumer Related Behaviors (i.e., watching television, etc.)
2. Giving Lectures on Consumer Related Activities (i.e., one-way lectures, etc.)
3. Holding Discussions About Consumer Decisions
4. Acting as an Example (i.e., taking the child shopping, etc.)
5. Allowing the child to learn from experience (i.e., giving him money and allowing him to make a buying decision, etc.)

The thirty sets of categorized data were then given to seven specially selected consumer behavior judges who used their expert knowledge and experience to determine each family group's consumer teaching orientation level.

The Use of Expert Opinion and Interjudge Reliability

While objective data are more preferable, subjective data are more feasible when dealing with human values (Simon, 1969). Indeed this seems to be the case here. As such, the expert opinion method was used during this phase of the study to judge family group consumer teaching orientations. Expert opinion was defined as those individuals who have spent considerable time gathering, studying, and processing information related to consumer behavior theory and research.

A panel of seven expert judges was recruited and required to individually apply their knowledge in ranking each interviewed family group in terms of its consumer teaching orientation. Each family was judged in terms of the previously presented four parental consumer-oriented goals and five consumer teaching modes. The experts assigned the following dimension values to each of the nine variables: 1) Low Consumer Teaching Orientation, 2) Moderate Consumer Teaching Orientation, and 3) High Consumer Teaching Orientation.

To determine interjudge reliability, the Kendall coefficient of concordance: W* was used to assess the significance of the differences among rankings of consumer teaching orientation values (Siegel, 1956). Applying the formula, including correction for ties, the W and r values were determined. With this valid measure, nine family groups were then selected to be included in the observational design.

The Observational Design

Based on expert ratings of family consumer teaching orientations, nine families were selected from the thirty families interviewed. Those families were assigned to cells in a 3 X 3 observational design. The nine selected children ranged from five to eleven years of age. The design is shown in Figure 1.

Three family groups represented each of the three consumer teaching orientations. Of the three families assigned to each level, one family had a child representing one of three specified age groups. Most of the selected families also had other children. This information was gathered during the interviewing phase of the study.

Participant Observation

Frazer[17] has demonstrated the applicability of the participant observation method for studying child television viewing and Denzin (1972) has underscored its importance in studying social interaction among children. The participant observation method was used here because it allows the researcher the opportunity to actively construct and chart the social activity that is being examined. The method lets the researcher actually share the "real life" experiences of those whom he is studying linking interactional patterns with the symbols and meanings believed to underlie children's interaction with television content (Denzin, 1971). The method also avoids any tendencies that the researcher might have toward prejudging the true nature of the viewing situation. Rather than going to the viewing situation with perceived theoretical notions (e.g., age-graded and determined

stages of cognitive development), it forces the researcher to study the empirical nature of the natural viewing situation. Behavior specimens were used to record and reproduce the interactions (Denzin, 1971).

Behavior Specimens

Rather than treating measurement as a separate phase of the research act, behavior specimens were used to capture the actual temporal sequence of the social interaction under analysis. This recording technique provided the opportunity to investigate emerging patterns of child interaction with television commercials and with others in the viewing situation. Moving back and forth between recorded behavioral sequences, behavior specimens allowed the identification of sequential phases of children's behavior, showing how each interactional phase was influenced by past phases.

Observational Periods

Children's television programming segments have been identified in the literature. However, since this study was concerned with children's responses to the content of television commercials while in the presence of other family group members, observational periods were selected and scheduled in accordance with natural patterns of family group television viewing. Observations were then scheduled and completed with each of the children. To minimize the impact of time, observations were grouped as closely together as possible. The observations were completed over a three month period.

The length and nature of the observations were based on Frazer's (1976) demonstrated use of the behavioral episode. Although each observation was scheduled to last one hour, the actual observational time was guided by the behavior of those in the viewing situation and their constance by direction toward the viewing activity. (Wright, 1967). Beginnings and ends of observational periods were identified by natural breaks in television viewing. As such, episodes lasted

until the child or some other member of the viewing situation redirected their activity or were redirected. The amount of time actually spent observing varied within the one hour framework, since some periods contained numerous episodes of viewing interaction.

Though the validity and reliability of this sampling strategy might be questioned by those unfamiliar with naturalistic inquiry, the strategy strictly adheres to the fundamental rules accepted by the scientific community. By determining when interaction concerning television commercials routinely occurs, the behavioral observations were situationally recorded and detailed. Reliability was assured by the repeatability of similar viewing time segments across the nine children observed. Addressing the twin problems of validity and reliability, Denzin (1971: 171) has observed that the responsible researcher,

> ...samples at "peak" times and justifies his decisions by the working knowledge of the unit in question. He stratifies and cuts up his subject's behavior into theoretically informed, empirically grounded sub-units. If he has successfully entered the subject's worlds he should know the salient temporal features and he can make his sampling-observational decisions on that basis.

OBSERVATIONAL DATA

Cognitive developmental studies of children's understanding of television advertising have relied primarily on verbal responses to structured questionnaire items. Rather than measuring a child's ability to understand, it is quite possible that what this research has really been measuring is verbal behavior. While a child may understand the differences in programming and commercials, he may not be equipped in terms of vocabulary or communicative ability to make clear verbal distinctions to research questions. To fully understand the child/television advertising relationship, measurement must go beyond simple verbal utterances as indicators of understanding. As with any other social process, a child's ability to understand the nature and purpose of television advertising is observable covertly through symbolic conversations and encounters and overtly through conversations

with others, declarations of behavioral intention, through behavioral gestures, movements, and actual performance (Denzin, 1971).

Gathered in naturalistic family group viewing situations, the following behavior sequences from the observational records support the view that children, including preschool children, have the potential ability to deal with television advertising and that this ability is affected by the particular family group's consumer teaching orientation. Examples of the impact of interactional experience on a child's viewing sophistication are evident in the observational data reported below. The format used to report the data is modeled after similar sociological studies.

Like the older children described in the cognitive developmental studies, C7, age 5, exhibited a well-developed and sophisticated understanding of television advertising. Rather than being the cognitively unsophisticated viewer often described in the literature, C7, even as a preschooler, demonstrated the ability to differentiate between television programming and commercials. Examples of this ability were evident in the observational data and supported by the initial interview with his parents. An interesting example of C7's ability is illustrated by the following behavior sequence.

Behavior Sequence 1

(C7 is sitting on the floor watching television, H7 and W7 are seated in chairs. A commercial for Purina Cat Chow appears on the screen featuring a number of cats dancing to the jingle, "Chow Chow.")

C7: (attention focused on the commercial) That's dumb. Cats can't dance like that. (points to the screen)

H7: Why not? How do you know cats can't dance like that? (challenges C7's comment)

C7: 'cause Barney (i.e., the family cat) eats that stuff (i.e., Purina Cat Chow) and don't dance around like that (points to cat curled up in the kitchen).

H7: You are very smart. You remember what we told you, huh. (refers to conversations the family group has had concerning the purpose and nature of television advertising).

C7: Yea. They don't always tell the real truth . . . do they?

In the above sequence, C7 clearly demonstrates that he understands that television commercials do not always present the true realities of everyday social life. His comments about the cat food commercial indicate that a preschool child has the potential ability to understand and resolve complex and ambiguous stimuli rather than being a cognitively unsophisticated viewer whose ability is determined by and develops only with increasing chronological age.

Another example of C7's ability of differentiation is given below:

Behavior Sequence 2

(C7 is watching the Six Million Dollar Man with the family. A commercial for NASA featuring Michelle Nichols, who played the role of Lt. Uhura in the Star Trek series, appears on the screen)
C7: hey! That's the girl who plays on Star Trek She is not going to be here. Did you know Mom? (referring to an upcoming Star Trek convent[illegible]at is going to be held in Phoenix).

This episode demonstra[illegible] that C7 has the ability to separate program content from commercial content and to bring such content interpretation in line with past and anticipated social events. C7 is a frequent viewer of Star Trek and has been exposed to the character, Uhura, on many previous viewing occasions. His comment concerning the upcoming Pheonix convention indicates that he has seen the commercial announcements promoting the event (i.e., at the time of this observation, such spots were being run on the stations in the Pheonix area) and was aware that Michelle Nichols would not be appearing. When questioned about how he knew Nichols would not be at the Phoenix convention, C7 responded that his father had informed him of the fact during a previous commercial exposure promoting the convention.

The following episode provides additional support to the observations reported above and is only one of numerous other examples that could be drawn from the observational record of C7, which illustrates his cognitive sophistication as a television viewer.

Behavior Sequence 3

(C7 is watching television. The only other person present is the observer. A commercial for the Six Million Dollar Man doll appears on the screen).

C7: I got that for my birthday. (points to the screen and directs comment at the observer)

Ob: Is it fun to play with?

C7: Yea! It's lots of fun.

Ob: Boy, the Six Million Dollar Man sure does a lot of super things on TV--running fast as cars--jumping over buildings. . .

C7: 'sure does. But my Six Million Dollar Man don't do that. (refers to the observer's above comment)

Ob: Why not? (observer attempts to probe C7's understanding)

C7: 'cause! That's on TV.

Ob: What do you mean? Your doll can't do those things you just saw in that commercial? (observer points to TV screen)

C7: Dummy!! That's just stuff in a commercial. We (i.e., refers to his friends) could play like that if we had those things. (refers to props and scenes used in the commercial presentation)

Ob: Look at that! (attempts to redirect C7's attention to the TV set)

Questioning of H7 and W7 also revealed that the above observational episodes were not just rare or chance incidents. It was their observation that C7 has a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of television advertising and frequently reveals such understanding in his reactions to television commercials. More important, perhaps, is the fact that this ability was not surprising to them given that they had taken an active role in teaching C7 to deal with television advertising as well as other related aspects of the consumer learning process.

Although similar differential abilities were observed in the older children included in the sample (i.e., A3, age 10, B6, age 11, B8, age 8, and T9, age 10), what seems to be suggested by the behavior sequences reported above is that a preschool child is a potentially sophisticated television viewer. These findings, despite their tentative nature, clearly challenge the view that a child's ability

to understand television advertising is determined by age-graded stages of cognitive development.

The preceding comments, however, do not intend to suggest that all preschool children are as sophisticated processors of the content of television commercials as C7. Rather, they simply suggest that all preschool children have the potential ability to deal with television advertising and that such ability is not a product of increasing age. As suggested by the observational records of the three preschool children under study here, a particular preschool child's potential level of understanding is influenced, to some extent, by what his parents have attempted to teach him about television advertising, as well as other related consumer skills and knowledge. Observational examples of the impact of family group consumer teaching orientation on a preschool child's understanding of television advertising are presented and discussed below.

While the observations revealed C7 as having the developed ability to interpret and handle television commercials, no instances of such viewing sophistication were evident in the observational records of M1, age 4, or E4, age 5. As revealed in the initial interview, unlike C7's parents, M1's parents are not overly concerned about his development as a consumer and have made no planned attempts to teach him to understand the nature and purpose of television advertising. Likewise, E4's parents, although somewhat more concerned about E4's development as a consumer than M1's parents, have not been very involved in purposeful and planned consumer teaching. Purposeful consumer teaching only takes place when E4 asks specific questions about particular commercials. Moreover, as indicated in several observations of Family Group 4's viewing behavior, H4 and W4 are not always responsive to E4's questioning, often paying no attention to such questioning or simply instructing him to keep quiet. The situation is quite different in Family Group Seven, as H7 and W7 are deeply concerned about C7's ability to understand

television advertising, and beginning at age 2, became actively involved in the consumer learning process.

Being from a family group with a high consumer teaching orientation, then, C7, unlike M1 or E4, carries to the viewing situation the ability to interpret the content of television commercials in relation to past parental interaction. This ability is apparently related to the fact that television commercials, like other social objects, take on meaning in terms of what the individual carries to the viewing situation. The impact of past parent/child interaction concerning television advertising is illustrated in both Behavior Sequences 1 and 2. These observations also suggest that other relevant social experiences influence a child's development and thus must be taken into account when studying the child/television advertising relationship.

The impact of parent/child interaction, for example, is demonstrated in Behavior Sequence 1 by C7's comments that just because cats can dance in television commercials does not mean that they can actually dance in real life. In this instance, C7 was informed by his parents very early in life that television advertising does not always depict the true realities of everyday social life. Furthermore, he is aware that his pet cat eats that particular brand of cat food, yet his cat never dances. Such ability of interpretation is certainly related, to some extent, to preceding interaction with his parents and his actual experiences with his pet cat.

Parental impact, though not directly related to consumer teaching orientation, was also evident in C7's comments about the Star Trek character, Uhura, as reported in Behavior Sequence 2. In this instance, C7 was able to differentiate the fictitious character from the real person, Michelle Nichols, and was aware that the person would not be appearing at the upcoming convention. As suggested by the observation, this awareness is the product of previous father/child interaction concerning the character, Uhura, the NASA commercial featuring Michelle Nichols, and the upcoming Phoenix Star Trek Convention.

Another interesting example of the impact of family group consumer teaching orientation is provided by the following episode.

Behavior Sequence 4

(C7 is watching television with his parents. A commercial for M&M's candy appears on the screen. The M&M man is portrayed dancing merrily around a group of small children. The spot ends with the tag line, "M&M's melt in your mouth and not in your hands.")

C7: (is bouncing to the commercial jingle)

W7: Hey. I bet they will melt in your hands. (directs comment to C7)

C7: They do. One time, I had them melt in my hands. (points to his hands)

W7: But the commercial just said that they melt in your mouth and not in your hands.

C7: . . . do melt in your hands. (looks at Mother in bewilderment)

W7: You are right. They will melt in your hands if you hold them long enough. You see, the heat from your hands will cause the coating to melt. Television commercials don't always tell you the whole truth. Remember that.

C7: I do. But they are good tasting. (throws hand up to mouth as if he is eating candy)

The above observation adds additional support to the fact that the meaning of television commercials is a product of parent/child interaction and those experiences that the child carries to the viewing situation. From previous social experience, C7 knows that the candy will melt and thus questioned the advertising claim. W7, consistent with the family group consumer teaching orientation, used this particular situation to explain why the candy melts and to remind C7 that advertising information must sometimes be viewed with skepticism. This finding further supports the view that parental involvement in a child's consumer development is an important mediating influence in a child's ability to understand television advertising for in all of the above episodes, the commercial presentations were interpreted and acted toward by C7 in relation to past parent/child interaction concerning television commercials, as well as other related social experiences. No instances of similar parent/child interaction were observed in Family Group One

or Family Group Four. Likewise, neither M1 nor E4 exhibited the viewing sophistication observed in C7.

What seems to emerge from the observational data is that in studying the child/television advertising relationship, age should be defined in terms of interactional experience rather than in terms of chronological, age-graded stages of cognitive development; for age, per se, does not seem to be a good indicator of a child's level of viewing sophistication. From the data, there can be little question that the preschool child, like the second or third grader, has the potential ability to understand the nature and purpose of television advertising. Television commercials, like other social objects, take on meaning in relation to social interaction and the actions that people take toward them. As suggested by the observations reported here, a preschool child's ability to deal with television commercials is the product of social interaction with others, particularly interaction with family group members concerning television advertising and other related social experiences that the child carries to the viewing situation. The view of a child's ability as being determined by age-graded stages of cognitive development is an underestimation of the abilities of the child to understand and shape his experiences in relation to television advertising.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

While the findings of this study cannot be stated in statistical probabilities, the observations are empirically valid and suggestive (Denzin, 1971). The research contributes to the area of consumer socialization and challenges some of the assumptions commonly made in the literature concerning the child/television advertising relationship, especially those assumptions based on maturational, age-graded stages of cognitive development. Before recapping the observational data, some general observations concerning the character of the child/television advertising relationship should be noted.

While viewing interaction among the family groups in the sample was quite predictable within certain time periods, what went on in each family group viewing context varied widely. The character of the viewing situation, and thus the child's experience with television advertising, was significantly influenced by others in the particular viewing situation, the heterogeneous nature of television programming and commercials, and those experiences that the child carries to the viewing situation, especially those experiences based on interactional experience with the medium and parent/child interaction concerning television advertising. The picture suggested by these observations certainly does not support the model so often assumed in research in which television stimuli and the viewing context are viewed as unproblematic, the process of message reception is mechanically accountable, and only the reactions of children to commmercial stimuli remain to be overtly measured, or the model which assumes that children respond to television commercials based on internal psychological states or external sociological forces. However, the observations do support the view that the child/television advertising relationship is an interactive process and must be studied while the child is actually situated in front of the family's television set.

What these observations seem to generally indicate is that it is inappropriate to continue to base research on any developmental theory that sets fixed age levels at which certain responses to television commercials will appear or not appear. The findings presented here call such theoretical assumptions into question and suggest a different perspective for the examination of the child/television advertising relationship. The ramifications for research is the calling for a view of the child, not in relation to stages of chronological age, but in relation to various social interaction characteristics of the child/television advertising relationship, including, as this study has demonstrated, the impact of varying parental consumer teaching orientations on children's consumer learning processes.

Chronological age does not seem to be the only important key to children's viewing sophistication, other than as a general indicator as where to look for early instances of viewing habits and patterns. To understand the complex patterns of social interaction surrounding the child/television advertising relationship, behavior should be interpreted in relation to the people, situations, past experiences, and objects that the child confronts in daily life.

More than simply identifying age-related differences in elements of children's consumer learning, research should center around the developmental processes and the modifications of early learning over time (Ward, 1974). As skilled interactants at early ages, children identify and define the nature of television commercials in relation to consumer-related levels of interaction with parents, make demands and requests of parents and others in relation to the character of viewing situations, seek out information about commercial content and other social events, plan future social actions toward and through television commercials, and negotiate various joint acts with others while situated in front of the family's television set.

As a result, children's actions toward and understanding of television advertising are contingent on the character of their social environment, especially past social experiences and what parents have taught them about television advertising. Rather than continuing to link rates of consumer development with age-fixed and determined responses, future research needs to recognize that differences in chidlren's level of viewing sophistication are influenced by (1) the consumer-related goals and skills that parents teach them; (2) the types of viewers who make up particular viewing situations; (3) the activities that take place and are allowed in viewing situations; (4) differences in the time periods under study; (5) the nature of preceding social events and their subsequent influence on behavior; (6) the nature and content of particular commercials in relation to a child's previous

experience with products, situations or people; and (7) the impact of competing and reinforcing sources of interpersonal and mass-mediated information. Further, it must be recognized that children are complex social beings who are continually confronted with conflicting definitions and interpretations of what a proper consumer should be. The interactional complexity of consumer socialization processes needs to be incorporated into future research if a clear-cut picture of the child/television advertising relationship is to emerge.

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FIGURE 1

Observational Design

Family Consumer Teaching Orientations	Age Of Children: 3 to 5	6 to 8	9 to 11
High Orientation			
Moderate Orientation			
Low Orientation			

NOTE: Nine family groups, according to their measured consumer teaching orientations and the age of one of the children, will represent each of the observational design cells diagrammed above.